THE MORTON ARBORETUM

Joy Morton, founder LISLE, ILLINOIS

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TREES OF THE MORTON ARBORETUM (DECIDUOUS) X

Acer rubrum (L.), Red, Scarlet or Swamp Maple

Seldom are common names more appropriate than those by which this handsome maple is known. For with red a feature of some part of its anatomy practically the year through, what more ample justification is necessary? And, in consideration of the trees' natural preference for streamsides, lowlands and swampy areas the aptness of the name Swamp Maple is equally obvious.

Other than the Box Elder, no other native maple has a wider distribution in Canada and the United States, the Red Maples' range extending from Nova Scotia through Quebec and Ontario to Minnesota and southward to Texas and Florida. The climatic extremes represented attest to the trees' remarkable adaptability.

Mature Red Maples show a pleasing shapeliness, the crowns varying from oval to rounded. Young trees are more often pyramidal or elliptical. Tall, straight trunked and of moderately fast growth the species will average from 40 to 50 feet in height with specimens exceeding 100 ft. and trunk diameters of 3 or 4 not uncommon in parts of the range. Smooth, light gray bark resembling that of European Beech is typical of immature trees, while older trunks are dark gray clothed with rough bark separated into shaggy plates.

The first traces of red to which the tree owes its name become evident in late winter with the intensifying of the coloring of the smooth twigs and shoots and of the oppositely arranged blunt leaf buds. It is when the plump, clustered flower buds open several weeks after those of the Silver Maple, however, that the tree really lives up to its name, the bright flowers providing one of the most conspicuous features of the early spring landscape. Of two sexes, both of which may occur on the same tree or separately, the female (pistillate) flowers are by far the showiest. Always red and borne on drooping pedicels, they later develop into the seeds whose divergent keys are likewise handsomely colored. Their ruddy cast disappears before they ripen in late May and early June. The fuzzy, pollen bearing (staminate) inflorescences are orange yellow and composed of many stamens.

There is a tinge of red in the opening leaves, too, as well as in the long petioles and radiating leaf veins. The foliage, while variable in size

(3 to 6″ long), shape and texture, is three to four lobed with the lobes separated by identifying sharp "V" angles. It varies from medium to dark green in color, and shows distinctly whitish undersurfaces. In the wild it changes color early in the fall due perhaps to its preference for low areas in which frosts are most apt to settle. No other tree is showier in autumn garb than a Red Maple bedecked in bright scarlet or crimson, and if for no other reason this autumnal feature alone commends the tree for landscape use. To furnish shade, serve as a lawn specimen or as a street tree for planting along suburban roadways, it is a worthy, easily grown ornamental.

Two of the largest Red Maples in the Arboretum, one of which is illustrated, are on the South lawn of the Thornhill Building, where Simonds Road emerges from the woods. Other specimens may be seen in the Meadow north of the Arboretum Center as well as along Forest Road east of Spring.

Sassafras albidum (Nutt-Nees), Sassafras

Sassafras, distinctive member of the Laurel Family, best known as the tree with leaves of three shapes, is a typical American indigenous to only two other places in the world, Central China and the Island of Formosa. Common in parts of its range which extends from Southern Vermont, west through Michigan and Iowa and south to Florida and Texas, it occurs both as an understory tree and as an inhabitant of woodland margins, fence rows and neglected fields. It always favors light, well drained soils.

Familiar to most people as a low growing semi-shrubby (15 to 25 ft.) plant spreading like the Sumacs in dense thickets, the Sassafras will, if given plenty of room, develop into a good sized tree (30 to 50 ft., rarely 100) of considerable personality. Its stout main branches leave the trunk horizontally or at odd angles, curve upward and terminate in a series of upturned twigs. The bark is interesting at every stage of development, from the persistent green of young branchlets to the thick, reddish brown, deeply furrowed bark of older specimens. Always present is the aromatic odor and spicy taste characterizing not only the twigs and leaves but the roots as well.

Sassafras flowers, small chartreuse colored stars arranged in drooping racemes at the ends of the twigs, are of two kinds, with the pollen and seed bearing forms generally occurring on separate trees. They open with the unfolding leaves and when the bloom coincides with that of Redbud a combination of subtle beauty results. Dark blue fruit, ellipsoidal in shape and seated on bright red stalks, follows in autumn. Considered a delicacy by the birds, they seldom have a chance to fully ripen.

Variable foliage is the most characteristic earmark of the Sassafras, however, the thin, alternately arranged leaves from four to six inches long occurring in three shapes, oval, single mitten and two thumbed or double mitten. It is not unusual to find all three on the same branch. A rich green velvety tone without highlights typifies the summer color with autumn introducing a spectacular brilliance. The sequence of the color change is especially noteworthy as the lower leaves turn first, their conspicuous ruddiness contrasting markedly with the yet green upper leaves. Then, with the season's advance the entire foliage mass becomes flaming orange or burnished gold.

The largest Sassafras specimens in the Arboretum are north of the Old Fashioned Rose Garden near the intersection of the walk into the lilac collection (see illustration). Smaller trees will be found along Forest Road and Oakwood Drive.

E. L. Kammerer

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